

Survey finds Americans struggle to maintain healthy habits during the holiday season

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The Schulman family knows how hard it is to keep their normally healthy routine amidst holiday travel and endless to-do lists. Experts say that saying "no," whether that's to invitations that overpack your schedule or to having another cookie, can go a long way toward maintaining healthy habits this time of year. Credit: The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center

The holiday season is a time for joy and celebration but many Americans admit the endless flurry of activities makes it difficult to eat healthy, exercise, and get adequate rest, according to a new survey from The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center.

Two-thirds of those surveyed said they overindulge in food, nearly 45% said they take a break from exercise, and more than half report feeling tired and having less time for themselves. Plus, a third admit they drink more alcohol during the holidays.

"Holiday travel, activities with friends and family, and trying to get a bunch of things done can cause people to lose track of their healthy habits," said Barbara Bawer, M.D., family medicine physician at Ohio State Wexner Medical Center and clinical assistant professor of family and [community medicine](#) at The Ohio State University College of Medicine. "If one healthy habit drops off, it can affect other areas very quickly."

To make it through the [holiday season](#) with healthy habits intact, Bawer suggests sticking to a normal routine as much as possible while giving yourself some grace.

"Once you're out of a routine, which typically happens around the holidays, it's really hard to get back on track partly because the motivation is no longer there," said Bawer.

When the invitations start to pile up and decadent menus feel tempting, Bawer offers this advice, "Remember that it's OK to say no."

To keep healthy habits in check, try the following:

Diet: When it comes to sustaining healthy eating habits, it's important to plan ahead. If you have an evening event, don't starve yourself all day.

Eat a high protein, low carb meal earlier in the day so you don't overeat. You can indulge with a favorite dish or dessert, but it's OK to say no to sampling every entrée or treat so you're not eating excess calories at each event.

Exercise: Try to keep the same exercise schedule. If an obligation prevents you from going to a fitness center or going for a run, be flexible. It's OK to say no to the gym and consider doing an activity with family and friends that keeps you moving, like going for a walk or playing a game of basketball.

Sleep: Go to sleep and wake up at your normal times, even when traveling. Limit the use of supplements like melatonin, as [long-term use](#) can disrupt healthy sleep-wake cycles. It's OK to say no to some invitations if you feel like you're going to overextend yourself.

Alcohol: People may drink more during the holidays, but [binge drinking](#) is never a healthy choice. Binge drinking is when a man consumes five drinks or a woman consumes four drinks in one sitting. It's OK to say no to excessive drinking. If you do drink, try to stick to the recommended two drinks for men or one drink for women. Avoid drinking on an empty stomach, and drink plenty of water.

"Small, consistent changes and slowly adding to them can help you reach your health goals," Bawer said.

Survey results and methodology

This survey was conducted on behalf of The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center by SSRS on its Opinion Panel Omnibus platform. The SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus is a national, twice-per-month, probability-based survey. Data collection was conducted from Oct. 20-23 among a sample of 1,007 respondents.

The survey was conducted via web (n=977) and telephone (n=30) and administered in English. The margin of error for total respondents is +/-3.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. All SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus data are weighted to represent the target population of U.S. adults ages 18 or older.

Provided by Ohio State University Medical Center

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